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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 GABORONE 000667

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DEPT FOR AF/S HOFSTATTER

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SUBJECT: BDP RECONCILIATION ON TRACK - FOR NOW

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH HUGGINS FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Botswana Democratic Party's Women's Wing chose a compromise slate of leaders at its May 5-8 national congress providing the first evidence that Vice President Khama's efforts to unite the Party are succeeding. This comes just ahead of the Party's national congress in July, where Khama's reconciliatory campaign will face its greatest test. Increasingly, BDP members see Khama as exercising presidential authority and Mogae as a lame duck. Not everyone in the BDP is happy with that, however, including some of his erstwhile supporters. END SUMMARY.

BDP WOMEN'S WING MEETING YIELDS COMPROMISE . . .

2. (U) At its biannual national congress May 5-8, the BDP Women's Wing chose a slate of leaders agreed upon by representatives of the Party's two rival factions (now known as the Nkate-Merafhe and Kedikilwe-Kwelagobe factions). According to MP for Mahalapye West Botlogile Tshireletso, who will return for a third tenure as chair of the Wing, the women of the BDP recognized that elections are a more democratic way of selecting leaders but could have been fatally divisive, and therefore felt that party unity was paramount at the time.

. . . BY A NARROW MARGIN

3. (C) Despite the explicit and fervent endorsement of Vice President Khama, the compromise outcome of the women's congress narrowly succeeded. Tshireletso informed PolOff on May 12 that many delegates had arrived at the event unaware of the details of the proposed agreement, a reflection of the fact that its opponents would be all too happy to shoot it down. During the congress, several representatives of the Nkate-Merafhe faction argued against compromise, believing that they would win an open contest. The followers of Kedikilwe-Kwelagobe endorsed a negotiated outcome, knowing that it would pave the way for a similar outcome of the Party's national congress in July, thereby preserving their hold on at least some levers of power.

BDP REUNIFICATION ON TRACK

4. (C) The result of the Women's Wing congress indicates that Vice President Khama's efforts to broker a party-wide reconciliation are making progress. A BDP contact told the Ambassador that the faction leaders had agreed that current Secretary General and MP from Molepolole South Daniel

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Kwelagobe will retain his post, as will his Deputy, Minister of Education Jacob Nkate. Tshireletso, who is also the BDP's Chief Whip in parliament, cautioned PolOff, however, that this outcome is not guaranteed since the members of the Nkate-Merafhe faction continue to lobby against it. Kefentse Mzwinila, a leader of the BDP youth and active member of the Kedikilwe-Kwelagobe group, told PolOff that his faction has been burned before on compromise deals that fell through at the last minute. He said that Kedikilwe-Kwelagobe delegates will go to the party congress in July armed with a "plan B" list of nominees drawn solely from their number in case the Nkate-Merafhe faction attempts a coup.

KHAMA, NOT MOGAE, AT THE HELM

5. (C) Due in part to his role in trying to unite the Party, BDP members appear increasingly to view Khama as the real political ruler of Botswana and Mogae as a lame duck. Mzwinila told PolOff that Mogae's various public denials that factions exist within the Party have reinforced the perception within the BDP that Mogae is out of touch with reality. Tshireletso described Mogae as on his way out the door. She believed that Khama had chosen the current cabinet and planned to see Khama, not Mogae, suggesting a cabinet reshuffle in 2006 to include some Kedikilwe-Kwelagobe loyalists to promote party unity.

CONCERNS ABOUT PRESIDENT KHAMA

6. (C) Not everyone in the BDP is comfortable with the idea of President Ian Khama. Minister of Education Jacob Nkate, long considered a close ally of Khama, recently told the Ambassador that Botswana would have in Khama a president

unfit for the job. Unlike Mogae, who is an economist, Khama lacks the grasp of economic and development related issues upon which a president must make important decisions, he opined. Nkate feared that Khama would surround himself with "idiot" yes-men. Harkening back to allegations of improper purchases by the Botswana Defense Force from a company owned by Tshekedi Khama, Ian Khama's brother, when the latter was Commander of the military, Nkate worried that corruption in high places would rise under Khama as well.

17. (C) Tshireletso, who belongs to neither faction but tends to sympathize more with the Kedikilwe group, echoed some of these concerns. She described some of the new faces in cabinet as Khama's "bootlickers." (Note: During the Women's Wing congress, Khama had basked in the adoration of some delegates, including former MP and cabinet minister Tebelelo Seretse who publicly proclaimed herself Khama's "bootlicker." End Note.) Members of the BDP Central Committee from the Nkate-Merafhe faction, she said, do not speak in Committee meetings until Khama speaks, and then only to agree with him.

#### DE BEERS FUNDS POLITICAL CONSULTANT

18. (C) Perhaps reflecting some concern about the opposition's growing share of the popular vote, De Beers has apparently paid for a professional consultant for the BDP. BDP Executive Secretary Batlang Serema informed PolOff that a South African political consultant, Lawrence Schlemmer, was in Botswana to prepare a document advising BDP on strategies to remain in power. (Note: Schlemmer last came to Botswana in 1997, following the opposition's best electoral performance ever in 1994. His report recommended that then President Masire step down, Mogae take over and appoint Khama Vice President, all of which was implemented. End Note.) Kefentse Mzwiniila informed PolOff that associates of Schlemmer interviewed him for several hours as one of the major opinion shapers within the BDP. They quizzed him in detail about his perceptions of both Mogae and Khama. Mzwiniila stated that his interlocutors had informed him that Schlemmer had been hired by a company in South Africa with considerable interests in Botswana's mining sector (i.e. De Beers) to conduct the study. Tshireletso confirmed to PolOff that a friend of the party was paying for the report on its behalf.

#### COMMENT

19. (C) While it appears the BDP is starting to heal the deep internal rifts between its rival factions, concern about the prospect of a Khama presidency seems to be growing. These concerns underscore the importance of continued efforts to remind Botswana that its reputation as a democracy relatively untainted by corruption is its greatest asset. It also demonstrates the need to further strengthen civil society and enhance the independence of the legislature, judiciary, and autonomous government agencies in the face of a predominant executive.

HUGGINS